

Social Studies



The Jamestown Colony

by Cynthia Clampitt

When colonists arrived in Virginia in 1607, they named their settlement Jamestown, in honor of King James, the King of England. Jamestown was the first permanent English settlement in North America. The young colony survived with the help of Powhatan and Pocahontas. In this book you will read about the challenges the colonists faced and how Jamestown finally became established.

Vocabulary

colony

entrepreneur

charter

share

confederacy

barter

cooperation

need

want

burgess

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The Business of Starting a Colony

England needed more land because its cities were crowded. Because England is an island, there was nowhere for people to move. England also had few natural resources. The people of England had watched as Spain and Portugal established many **colonies**, settlements far from the country that rules them. Perhaps England needed colonies too.

In 1584 Sir Walter Raleigh, an English explorer and soldier, sent people to explore North America. They returned with reports of a beautiful land with friendly people and many natural resources. Raleigh named the area they visited Virginia. He thought this new land would give England more room and more resources.

Raleigh sent a group of people to Virginia to start a colony, but there were problems. The colonists ran out of food, so they returned to England after one year. Raleigh tried again in April 1587. He sent 150 people to Roanoke Island. Homes were built, and the colony was started. The first English child born in North America, Virginia Dare, was born in August. However, there were problems with disease, and there was not enough food. A small group sailed to England to get supplies. When they returned, there was no trace of the colony. Not a single person was ever found. The settlement is still called the "Lost Colony."

Raleigh had spent most of his money setting up these colonies. It was now clear that settling North America would cost more than one person could afford, even a rich person. The task would be left to England's **entrepreneurs**, or people who start businesses with the hope of making a profit. A group of entrepreneurs in London decided to invest in North America.

In 1606 King James, the King of England, gave this group a **charter** to start a colony in Virginia. A charter is an official document that gives a group permission to do something. This group of entrepreneurs called themselves the Virginia Company of London. They sold **shares**, or part ownership of the company, to raise money. People could buy shares. By December 1606 the Virginia Company was ready to send three ships to North America.

This old map shows the area called Virginia, claimed by England, and the area called Florida, claimed by Spain. Both areas were much larger than the states that now have those names.

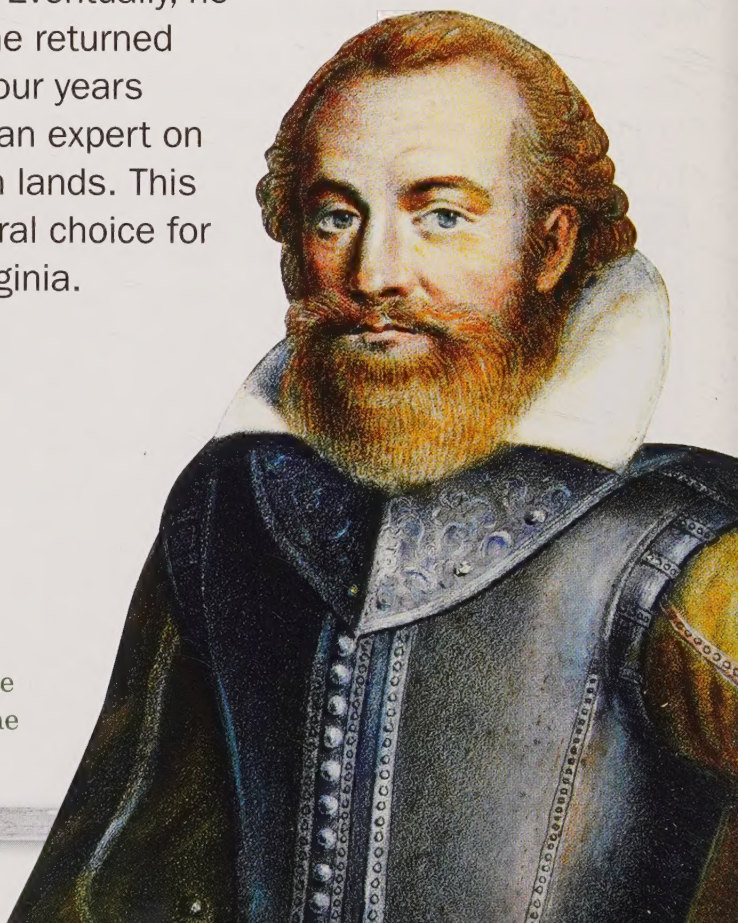


John Smith, Before Virginia

The Virginia Company hired men to lead the expedition to Virginia; one of them was Captain John Smith. Smith was the son of a farmer. He had some formal education, but much of his learning was the result of his love of reading. Both of Smith's parents died by the time he was sixteen years old. With no family, Smith decided to leave his quiet life in England and go to the Netherlands to help the Dutch fight for freedom from Spain.

When invading Turks threatened Austria and Hungary, Smith went to help the Austrian army. His intelligence and courage led to rapid promotion. However, the Turks won the war, and Smith was captured and taken as an enslaved person to Turkey. Eventually, he escaped. When he returned to London after four years away, Smith was an expert on survival in foreign lands. This made him a natural choice for helping settle Virginia.

Captain John Smith had already experienced a lifetime of adventure before he went to Jamestown.



Algonquian Words in English

Many Algonquian words were adopted into English, because the words described things for which the new colonists had no names. Here are a few of the many words from Algonquian languages that you may recognize:

hickory	pecan	skunk
moose	powwow	toboggan
moccasin	raccoon	tomahawk

American Indians in Virginia

The American Indians (also called Native Americans) who lived in Virginia spoke Algonquian languages. Algonquian is a family of languages spoken by North American Indian groups from Canada and the Great Lakes in the north, to the Rocky Mountains in the west, and as far south as North Carolina.

Powhatan was the head of an Algonquian-speaking group that migrated to Virginia during the 1500s. Powhatan's father defeated the American Indian groups that already lived in the region. Powhatan continued to conquer the surrounding groups, forming them into a **confederacy** of at least thirty different Algonquian-speaking groups. The confederacy was named after the powerful chief who ruled them: the Powhatan. It is not known how much larger Powhatan's empire might have become if English settlers had not arrived.



As soon as the settlers landed, they began to unload the tools, seeds, and food they would need to build the colony.

The Settlers Reach Virginia

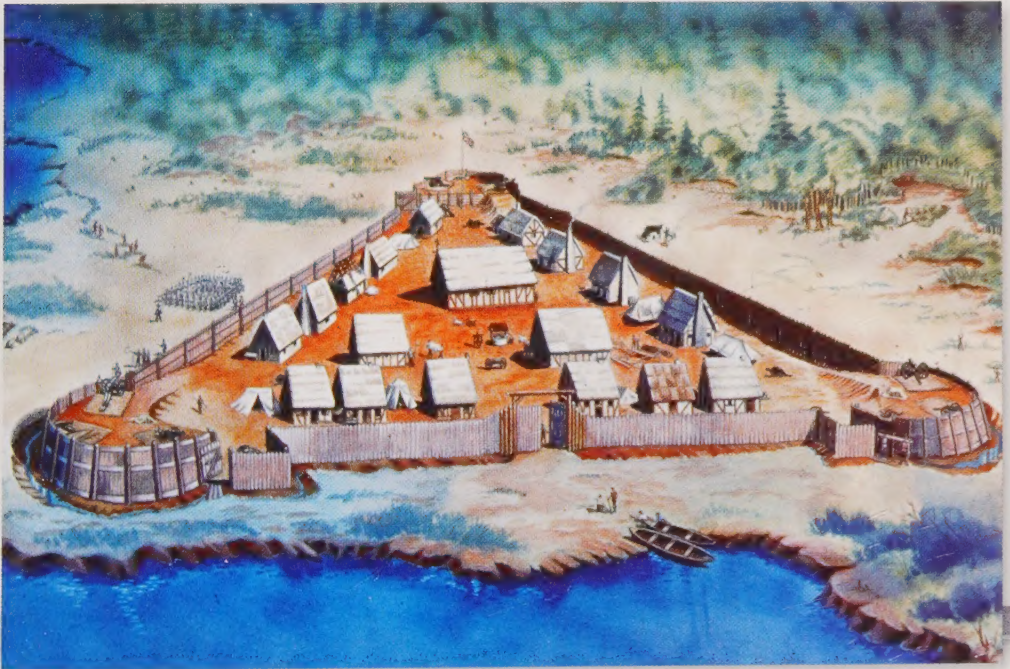
The new colony of Jamestown and the river near it were named for King James. On May 14, 1607, the ships sent by the Virginia Company reached the place where they would start Jamestown. The colonists chose a spot on the banks of the James River. They wanted to be close to the sea, but they also wanted to be far enough inland to avoid cannon fire from any Spanish ships that might come from Florida.

The only things the colonists had were the tools, seeds, and some food they brought with them. They had to create everything else they would need to survive. John Smith was soon directing the clearing of land and building of houses. The colonists began to realize how much they needed his leadership.

Soon after they landed, the colonists were attacked by members of the Powhatan confederacy. The colonists realized they needed protection. There were only a few more than a hundred men and boys available to work and stand guard. However, in little more than a month, the colonists managed to build a protective wooden wall around the church, storehouse, and small group of houses they had constructed.

The next big concern was food. The colonists had brought farming tools, and they began to plant their seeds. However, in the marshy, salty soil of Jamestown, they had difficulty growing English crops. John Smith, always interested in learning, went out exploring to see if there were any local foods that might help them. He also wanted to study the surrounding region.

Because of continued attacks, the colonists built a wooden fort for protection.



Captain Smith's Leadership

Smith was exploring with some other colonists in December 1607 when they were surprised by an American Indian hunting party. The hunters killed everyone except Smith, who they took prisoner. The hunters took Smith to Powhatan. Smith was impressed with the “Great Emperor” Powhatan. Powhatan kept Smith as a prisoner for about four weeks. Smith showed courage, and he also showed an interest in Powhatan’s people and culture. Powhatan came to respect John Smith.

Many people have heard the story about Pocahontas saving John Smith from being killed by Powhatan. This is what Smith truly believed happened. Many historians now believe that the “killing” was part of a ceremony. After the ceremony, Powhatan called Smith his son, and Smith was no longer a prisoner.



Even while being held prisoner, John Smith worked hard to get along with the American Indians and to learn from them.

Who is Matoaka?

Powhatan's daughter was actually named Matoaka. "Pocahontas" was a nickname.

Smith realized that the colonists' lives depended on their getting along with and learning from the American Indians. He learned their language. He thought it was important that Europeans know about American Indian culture. He wrote about the laws, customs, and agriculture of the groups he met as he explored Virginia. The books he wrote are still among the most important sources of information on what these groups were like.

The colonists began to **barter** with the Powhatan people. Farming tools and other useful objects from England were traded for food, which kept the colonists alive. Smith wrote that it was Pocahontas who was most responsible for helping the colonists.

John Smith also knew that **cooperation** among the colonists was important. Smith became famous for saying that anyone who refused to work would not eat. This angered some of the men, who felt that people like them should not work. However, Smith made sure everyone did his fair share.



John Smith was successful at trading with the Powhatan people.

More colonists arrived in 1608, but the colony continued to have problems. In September 1608 Smith was elected president of Jamestown, and things began to improve. He had the fort expanded, and he began training people in skills needed in the colony. Twenty houses were built, crops were planted, and colonists began fishing regularly. It looked like Smith would make the colony a success.

Smith put the **needs** of the colony ahead of the **wants** of the Virginia Company. The company wanted him to search for gold, but Smith was busy keeping the colonists alive. The company did not like that Smith did not search for gold. Also, the men who did not want to work complained about Smith. The Virginia Company decided that Smith should be replaced. Smith worked hard to stay in Virginia, but in September 1609, he was badly burned by a gunpowder fire, so he returned to England.

Hunger and Hardship

The winter after John Smith left almost brought the end of Jamestown. Diseases had always been a problem for the colonists. Many had died from malaria and other illnesses, but now they did not have Smith to get corn from the Powhatan. The winter of 1609–1610 became known as the Starving Time. By the end of the winter, only 60 people were left alive of the 214 who had been in Jamestown before the Starving Time.

The colonists were ready to give up. When an English ship arrived in May of 1610, the few colonists who were still alive decided to return to England. However, as the weak and ragged colonists sailed away from Virginia, they met another ship from England. They were told that more ships, supplies, and colonists were on the way. They turned back and returned to Jamestown.

The colonists who survived disease and starvation carried the dead out of the fort for burial.



A Fresh Start

Lord De la Warr was on a ship that arrived in Jamestown in 1610. The Virginia Company had given De la Warr the power to force the colonists to work and remove anyone on the council who gave him trouble.

De la Warr was not as wise in getting along with the Powhatan as he was with the English, however. He thought he should be tough with the American Indians, so he attacked some of the area's groups. Before long, the colonists were at war with the Powhatan.

The colony still continued to grow, and more colonists arrived. Back in England, John Smith had written that North America offered opportunities, but it did not offer easy riches—people would have to work if they went to Virginia. Because of Smith's writings, the people now arriving were more willing to work hard. A new fort was built farther up the James River. By 1613 there were more than seven hundred English colonists living in Virginia.

The colonists still needed to find a way for the colony to make money. The Virginia Company had watched Spanish ships return from South America loaded with gold. The Spanish had found new foods too, such as potatoes, chilies, chocolate, and tomatoes. The colony in Virginia had so far only produced hardship, death, and a few interesting books written by John Smith. What could the colony do to make money?



Tobacco was the crop that finally made money for the Virginia colony.

John Rolfe Grows Tobacco

It was John Rolfe who solved the money problem for the colony. Before he arrived in Virginia, Rolfe had traveled to the Caribbean, where he had gotten seeds from tobacco plants that the Spanish were growing. Tobacco was discovered in the Americas, and it had become popular in Europe. Rolfe took these seeds with him when he sailed for Virginia in 1610. He felt that the land and climate in Virginia would be good for growing tobacco.

In 1613 Rolfe sent his first batch of tobacco to England, where it became a great success. Soon many other colonists began to plant tobacco. The demand for tobacco increased quickly. In 1616 the colonists shipped 2,500 pounds of tobacco to England. In 1618 they shipped 20,000 pounds. Colonists even used tobacco to barter for goods.

Problems, Solutions, and Growth

Growing tobacco created problems too. The colonists were not growing as much food as they had before, because they were using so much land for tobacco. It takes a lot of work to grow tobacco, so hundreds of colonists were soon arriving in Virginia. As the Powhatan people tried to move farther away from the colonists, they found themselves getting closer to American Indian groups with whom they were enemies. The Powhatan began to strike back at the colonists, killing colonists or taking prisoners.

The English wanted the prisoners set free, so they captured Pocahontas. They told Chief Powhatan that he could have his daughter back if he returned the English prisoners. While Pocahontas was with the English, she met John Rolfe. They fell in love, and in 1614 they were married. The marriage of Pocahontas and John Rolfe brought peace between the English and the Powhatan as long as Chief Powhatan lived.

King James Against Tobacco

While many people in England were eager to get tobacco, King James hated it. He wrote articles and passed laws trying to stop it from coming in. He wrote that it hurt people's health and smelled bad. He taxed merchants who sold tobacco, but even the king could not stop the increasing popularity of a plant that was making so much money for merchants.



Jamestown in the 1620s and 1630s was a growing town.

In 1619 the Virginia Company gave the colony some control over their government. The colonists elected their first representatives, called **burgesses**. When the burgesses met in July 1619, it was the first meeting of elected lawmakers in a European colony. It was the first time colonists had a voice in their government.

When Chief Powhatan died, his brother became the new chief and led the Powhatan people. This new chief wanted to get rid of the English. In 1622 he led an attack that killed 347 colonists, but diseases killed hundreds more colonists than the attacks killed.

In 1624 King James cancelled the charter he had given to the Virginia Company. There were too many problems for a group of entrepreneurs to solve. Virginia became a royal colony and Jamestown continued to grow. Jamestown was the capital of Virginia until 1699, when the government moved to Williamsburg.

Glossary

barter trading one kind of good or service for another without using money

burgess an elected representative

charter an official document giving a person or group permission to do something

colony a settlement of people who come from one country to live in another land

confederacy a union of groups, countries, or states that agrees to work together for a common goal

cooperation to work together to get things done

entrepreneur a person who starts a new business, hoping to make a profit

need something that a person must have in order to live

share part ownership in a company that gives each shareholder a say in how the business is run and a part of the profits

want something that a person would like to have but can live without

Write to It!

Powhatan and Pocahontas liked Captain John Smith. Pick either Powhatan or Pocahontas and write a paragraph describing why you think he or she might have respected John Smith.

Write your paragraph on a separate sheet of paper.

Photographs

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Fascinating Facts

- Captain John Smith gave the name “New England” to the region surrounding England’s Plymouth colony.
- Though John Smith never returned to Virginia, he did see Pocahontas again when she visited him in England in 1616. Pocahontas also met the Queen of England.
- Pocahontas and John Rolfe’s son, Thomas Rolfe, was educated in England and returned to Virginia, where he became a leading citizen.

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